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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Security Council demands Croatian Government lift any time-limits on return of refugees to reclaim their property.

* Secretary-General expresses extreme concern at deteriorating situation in Burundi; says parties must not impede provision of humanitarian assistance.

* Secretary-General welcomes resumption of peace talks between Israel and Syria.

* United Nations ends 1995 with 50,000 peace-keepers deployed in 16 operations.

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The Security Council today expressed grave concern that the Government of Croatia had ignored its call of 3 October to lift any time-limits on the return of refugees to reclaim their property. In a statement by its President, Sergey Lavrov (Russian Federation), the Council said the Croatian Government's 27 December time-limit constituted a virtually insurmountable obstacle for most Serb refugees. It demanded that the Government lift immediately any time-limit placed on the return of refugees to reclaim their property.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today said he was extremely concerned about the deteriorating situation in Burundi. In recent weeks, violent confrontations in Bujumbura and neighbouring provinces had resulted in further movements of populations and increased suffering of innocent victims. Members of the humanitarian community in Burundi, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, had become targets of the unrest, seriously compromising the provision of assistance to those in need.

The Secretary-General called on all parties to honour the neutrality of humanitarian organizations, and not to impede the provision of humanitarian assistance. He also called on the Government of Burundi and all political

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parties to reaffirm their commitment to supporting humanitarian actions and to guaranteeing the safety of those providing assistance.

Meanwhile, Marc Faguy of Canada has been appointed as the Secretary-General's new Special Representative to Burundi. He will replace Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, who concluded his term of office at the end of October. Mr. Faguy will probably travel to Bujumbura late next week.

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The Secretary-General today expressed great satisfaction at the resumption of peace talks between Israel and Syria, scheduled to begin on 27 December. He described that development as a very positive step on the road to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

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The year 1995 saw some dramatic moments in United Nations peace-keeping, including some notable successes and some setbacks, a spokesman for the Organization said today. It started with 17 peace-keeping operations and ended with 16. Meanwhile, total troop strength declined from 69,000, from 77 countries, to around 50,000, from 80 countries. Some 90 peace-keepers were killed in 1995, down from 135 in 1994 and 203 in 1993. The total peace-keeping budget for the year was around $3 billion, although outstanding contributions stood at around $2 billion.

The United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) and the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) were successfully concluded in January and April, respectively. The United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) took over from the Multinational Force at the end of March, and the country remained safe and secure. Haiti held democratic legislative elections in mid-year and Presidential elections on 17 December.

The successes were somewhat overshadowed by the withdrawal of peace-keepers from Somalia in March, according to the spokesman. The United Nations had also faced tremendous difficulties in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the preventive deployment of peace-keepers in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continued to do a good job. Despite occasional setbacks, the Angolan peace process was cautiously progressing with United Nations assistance. The peace-keeping operation in Rwanda was slowly closing down, while there were some procedural difficulties with the identification process in Western Sahara.

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Please note: This will be the last edition of the Daily Highlights for 1995. However, should circumstances warrant, Central News will issue a special Highlights next week. Happy holidays to all our readers.

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